



National College for
School Leadership

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

ECM Premium Project

School leadership, Every Child Matters
and school standards

Identifying links between ECM and improvements in school standards

SCHOOL LEADERS

Report summary

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Introduction

This report describes the findings of a study into school leadership, the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and school standards undertaken by staff and associates of Quality in Study Support (QiSS), Canterbury Christ Church University and Leadership for Learning, University of Cambridge.

The specific aims of the project were to identify the evidence base for a link between ECM and improvements in school standards (commonly known as 'the ECM Premium') and to identify the nature and quality of leadership that underpinned it.

Methodology

The research took place in the autumn of 2007 and was in two parts:

1. A literature review covering academic research, Ofsted reports and frameworks and other published material such as case studies.
2. Fieldwork carried out in eight sites covering 14 schools.

Teams of up to three researchers carried out the fieldwork over three to four days in each of the eight sites. In all cases school visits included detailed interviews with members of leadership teams, other staff, pupils, parents and external partners as well as observation of lessons, school routines and procedures and a review of school documentation.

The schools and their communities

The sample comprised two primary schools, three secondary schools and one special school. Two clusters were included so as to explore differing ways of delivering extended services. Schools were selected from 50 schools that met the following criteria:

- in receipt of a good or outstanding grading in a recent Ofsted report for overall effectiveness and for leadership and management
- with a contextual value-added score that demonstrated significant progress in raising standards of attainment
- were known through their participation in the QiSS quality assurance processes to have well-established provision of extended services and interesting or innovative practice

As the majority of the schools were located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the need for close collaboration with statutory and voluntary agencies was of particular significance.

The outcomes of the study include a full report, case studies and leadership development materials, all of which are available on the ECM Leadership Direct website: www.ncsl.org.uk/ecmleadershipdirect

Connecting leadership and learning and school standards

There is a widely shared assumption by politicians, researchers, policy makers and the public at large that good leaders make good schools. While there is ample evidence from case studies and anecdotes to support the contention, the literature review, along with other meta-studies, revealed that 'hard' data from controlled and long-term studies has not provided unequivocal evidence of a direct causal connection. Nonetheless, there is a general consensus that effective leaders are instrumental in creating conditions for teachers to do their job more effectively and that the professional capacity of teachers may be inhibited or enhanced by a combination of structural and cultural factors which make up how the school goes about its business.

However, those who create the conditions for pupil, professional or system learning may not always be the headteacher or even senior leadership team. The trend towards distributed leadership in schools widens the responsibility for leadership by moving from a hierarchical structure and creating new roles, new responsibilities and increased autonomy of staff, so making the effects of leadership even harder to pin down.

Making clear connections with learning therefore requires going beyond measures of student attainment in tests and examinations to try and assess the impact on more substantive quality of life factors which are at the heart of the ECM agenda.

Extending schooling

Extended schools are a response to the persistent research finding that for many children, particularly those in challenging circumstances, conventional schooling is inadequate. As four decades of research into the school effect has shown, what happens outside schools has a greater impact on achievement than what happens within it. Over those four decades there has been a stubborn resistance to closing the gap between schools in the most and least socially privileged circumstances (Babb et al 2006).

Key findings

1. Pupils' needs were the focus of attention of the work of the schools. Strategic approaches to listening to pupils and families were a routine aspect of school improvement planning. Being responsive to family and community needs involved school leadership teams in challenging conventional constraints and thinking flexibly and creatively about the nature of the core offer of extended services, rather than taking it as a set of requirements to be met.
 2. The schools were working to raise standards by both attending to generic school improvement strategies and addressing the underlying obstacles to pupils' learning and achievement. Both approaches were seen as equally necessary. These schools had been 'community-orientated' prior to the introduction of ECM and had had study support programmes and partnerships with external agencies in place for several years. Projects and programmes which could be labelled as extended services were not seen as additional to but as integral to the core purposes of the school.
 3. Extended services can contribute to improved school standards in five main ways:
 - Directly, through programmes of study support activities such as holiday schools, booster classes and coursework catch-up sessions.
 - Semi-directly, through activities which address pupils' motivation and readiness to learn, such as through breakfast clubs, sports and arts activities and hobby clubs.
 - Indirectly, through programmes which enhance the abilities of families to support their children's learning, such as parenting programmes, family learning or through regular and more purposeful dialogues with parents about their children's learning.
 - Indirectly, through services, generally provided by external specialist agencies, which help pupils and their families overcome tangible obstacles to learning, such as case work with families, nursery provision for the children of school-age mothers, and family liaison workers to get children up in the morning and into school.
 - Indirectly, through programmes that raise the value which families and residents in the neighbourhood place on education and school.
 4. The schools, especially secondary schools, had used workforce remodelling creatively to establish new posts with new functions to meet children's and families' needs.
- The schools in this study used most or all of these approaches, but putting children's needs at the centre meant that the overall programme of services and how they were presented varied quite widely. Schools generally targeted pupils and families carefully but targeting could be used quite deliberately to ensure certain pupils and families used provision that was open to all. A key part of the success of these schools lay in the recognition that different approaches had different timescales and required different ways of collaborating with external partners.

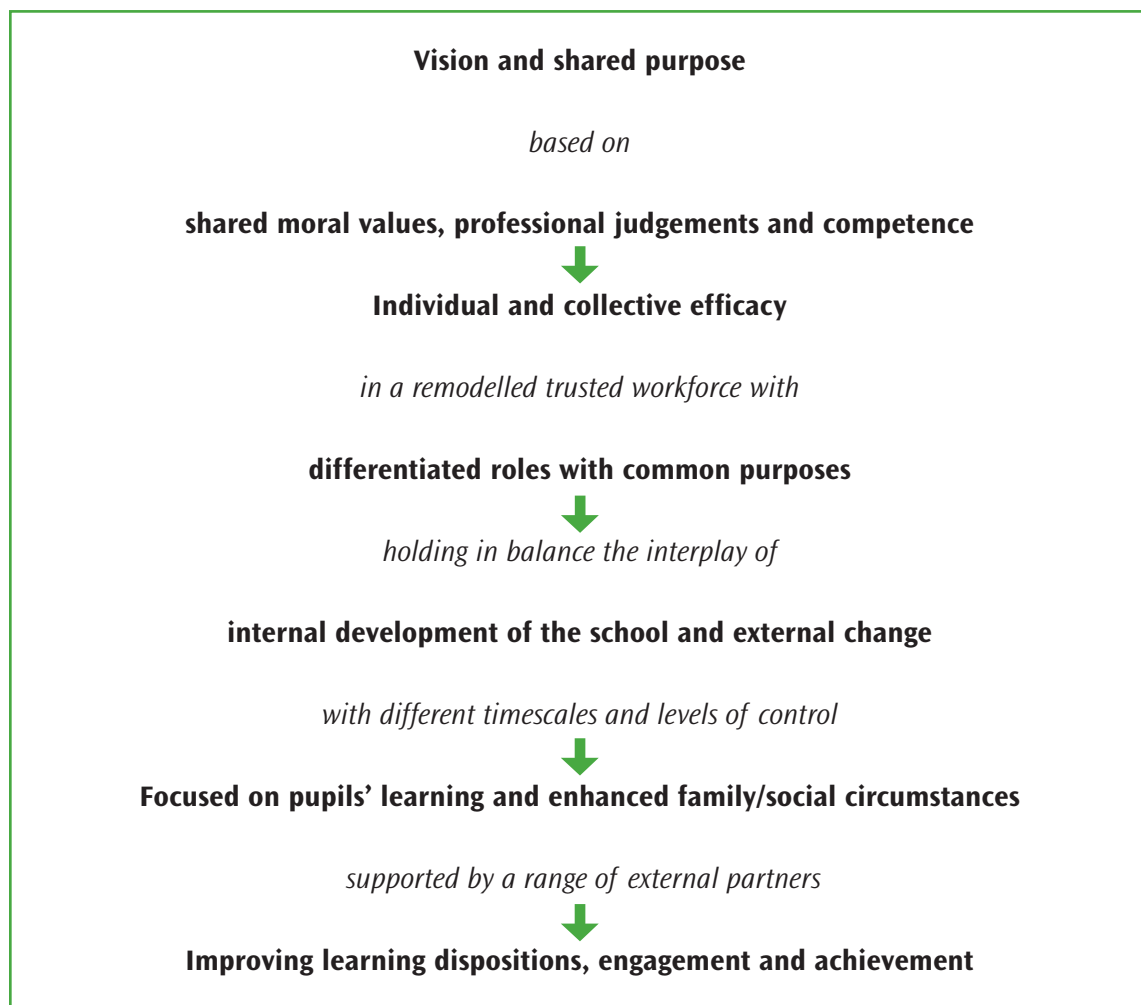
5. The standard measures of school improvement showed that these schools were on an improving trajectory, although not always on a straight line of rising outcomes. While staff made connections between the introduction of extended services and improved attainment, building the evidence base for a direct causal relation is a longer-term aim for all the schools in the study. Nonetheless, schools were using data on participation in study support and family activities as part of their self-evaluation, linking these to raised attainment. Case histories of success with individual pupils were also used as vital information in managing services in the school. While the ECM five outcomes accorded well with the purposes that the

schools had set for themselves, these were seen as aspirational: no school has yet developed a comprehensive set of 'success indicators' to evaluate progress towards achieving the five outcomes.

6. The ECM initiative resonated with staff in these schools because it reflected something that they had long been striving for. It legitimated what the head and the leadership team had seen as integral to the work of an extended school. It brought fresh impetus to their relationships both within the school and with their community partners.

The key findings are summarised in the figure below.

Figure 1



Implications for school leadership

The figure (as shown on page 7) represents a broad-brush picture of what the schools in this study had in common. We were also able to generalise what the leadership of these schools did in order to bring about the picture outlined in the figure.

Eight high leverage leadership actions

It was clear from this study that developing extended schools requires new forms of 'leverage' if they are to engage effectively with children, families and neighbourhoods. Analysis of how leadership teams in the 14 schools addressed the challenges produced eight leadership actions that connect the ECM agenda with raised pupil attainment and improved standards.

1. Navigating national, local authority and community politics

The ability to successfully address both the ECM and standards agendas in extended schools requires of leaders an acute grasp of national, local authority and community politics. Navigating a pathway through this political thicket requires a blend of pragmatism and idealism. In disadvantaged neighbourhoods economic and social instability and a constantly shifting population demand an enhanced level of flexibility and resilience. One headteacher's reference to 'strategic opportunism' well described the continuing creative response to policy initiatives and funding opportunities.

Some of the differences to be negotiated include:

- working practices and institutional conventions

- hierarchies and nature of authority
- professional norms and values
- use of language and language codes
- lines and modes of accountability
- clashes of culture
- short-term aims of schools as against longer-term aims of social and health agencies
- an accountability focused on academic attainment as against affective and social outcomes.

Navigating in this arena requires leaders to review with a more critical eye much of the standard educational terminology such as 'assessment', 'standards', 'achievement', 'potential' and 'value-added', for example. What these terms mean is not self-evident to those from other professional or lay backgrounds. Likewise, other terms in common usage have widely varying denotations, for example 'community', 'partnership', 'outcomes', 'consultation' and parental 'involvement'.

2. Engaging the commitment of staff, students and partners in a vision of the purposes and ethos of the school

A consistent strand within the leadership literature is the importance of a shared ownership of the school's vision, essential values and key purposes (see, for example, Starrat 1998; Fullan 2003; Sergiovanni 2004). In the schools in this study, engaging all stakeholders in crafting and revising the school's direction emerged as a clear priority among school leaders. It was taken as a fundamental precept that the school's direction was guided by a moral purpose. This has clear implications for the appointment and induction of new staff with selection criteria drawn around values and purposes and the ability of incomers to work with young people and with adults

in non-traditional ways. This core person specification is supported by the encouragement of new staff to grasp leadership opportunities through secondments, taking further qualifications such as Master's degrees in which teachers use key focus areas in the school for their research.

In challenging circumstances, it is a demanding but high priority task for leadership to encourage and support staff to "keep the faith", as one headteacher put it. These schools found it easier when it was part of the ethos of the school in meetings and conversations to explore values and purposes.

3. Shaping school culture and ethos proactively around children's needs

Leadership in these schools and clusters is committed to instilling a culture and belief that children and young people can learn, even in turbulent circumstances. This means creating the context and support structures that enable deep and meaningful learning to take place. The ability to work flexibly, fluidly and spontaneously across boundaries of classroom, school and community characterises the best of teaching in extended schools. However, managing emergent needs and identifying alternative forms of provision requires knowledge of where expertise may lie, both within the school and external to it, so extending the pedagogic repertoire.

It means looking beyond the conventional classroom, exploiting learning opportunities where children, young people and adults feel most comfortable and also most stimulated. In extended schools this assumes an even higher priority so that sites for 'out-of-hours' learning are explored extensively and imaginatively. This may take the form of breakfast clubs, homework clubs, Saturday schools, residential

weekends, Easter and summer schools, all encompassed under the 'study support' umbrella.

With the ECM agenda seen as integral to the school's key purposes decisions about programmes of activity are not made on the basis of traditional curriculum planning but with fresh thinking as to how the five key outcomes may be addressed in ways that re-engage young people with learning and raise their aspirations.

4. Creating structures that distribute leadership, spread responsibility and foster trusting relationships

The leadership challenge is one of re-engineering structures, routines, working habits and perceived priorities, keeping the needs of the child in the foreground both internally in the school and externally with other agencies. Secondary schools in this study had been radical in the expansion and restructuring of their senior leadership teams. Encouraging staff to use their initiative and share responsibility assumes an even higher priority in an extended school context. Every member of staff, governors and even parents and pupils may be expected to carry out responsibility for some of the wide range of activities that the school undertakes.

Trust is frequently cited as the social glue that underpins distributed leadership. It encompasses interpersonal respect, personal regard for others, role competence and personal integrity. Taken together these involve a willingness to be vulnerable to others based on a belief that those others will reciprocate with their mutual obligation to oneself and to the school. As these are habits embedded in lateral relationships there is consequently less necessity for close monitoring by the head or senior leaders. Trust and risk taking were seen as resting on a sense of reciprocal accountability.

5. Managing workforce remodelling with a clear understanding of, and sensitivity to, professional expertise and capacity

The remodelling of the workforce had created new roles to carry out functions such as child protection, management of extended services, family liaison and community development. A primary benefit was to allow teachers to concentrate on learning and teaching with support staff taking on other non-teaching duties.

In some cases pastoral responsibilities have been assumed by non-teaching Year managers, school counsellors and youth workers.

Senior leaders and teachers spoke of the attempt to create a three-way partnership within the school, encompassing teachers, pupils and support staff with a sharpened awareness of the family and community legacies that children bring with them to their learning. This entailed heightened awareness and flexibility of response in which “All opportunities for learning are seized”. This meant that in addition to the core function of teaching, other ways of enhancing learning were explored, such as personal mentoring and coaching. These were carried out by support staff, by pupils with one another, by parents and by staff and volunteers from other agencies.

6. Placing high priority on the professional development of the whole staff

As leadership is distributed it is, of itself, a powerful form of professional development. Taking initiative and exercising responsibility in the day-to-day life of the school within a supportive ethos is seen as having a greater impact than training events that do not necessarily confront the immediate dilemmas or engage direct experience in resolving them. Nor do such events normally allow the kind of delicate negotiation which is often required in dealing with ancillary and support

staff, teaching assistants, parents and representatives of other professional and community agencies.

Schools in this study placed a high priority on developing pedagogy in the classroom through lesson observation, mentoring and teachers working collaboratively on curriculum and assessment. A high priority was also given to providing formal and informal development opportunities for all staff.

7. Managing external relationships and the permeable boundaries between school and community

The need for an inward focus in leadership has to be weighed in the balance against the competing demands of the external world. While maintaining commitment and morale among partner agencies may not be solely the task of senior leaders, they do play a pivotal role in making relationships work. Through shared conversations leadership builds genuine respect for other organisations, helping to diminish prejudices and stereotypical views of social, community or health workers. It engages in a slow but purposive building of inter-organisational relationships, working towards a genuine and longer-term partnership with common goals and coordinated working practices.

The effective extended school is a highly permeable one. It does not ignore the importance of boundaries but sets them beyond the traditional parameters of mainstream schools. Leadership has a clear view of what can and should flow across the boundaries of school and community. Pupils, and parents, are part of the daily ebb and flow across school boundaries and schools in this study worked to ensure that they faced outwards to their neighbourhoods as well as inwards to their staff and pupils.

In extended schools the engagement of parents assumes particular significance. Ways of enticing parents into school have to be complemented by outreach strategies that take the school to where parents are. It was recognised that for some parents revisiting school was too painful a reminder of their own school days while for others both geographical and social distance presented obstacles. There was also a small but significant minority of demanding, and sometimes aggressive, parents, with whom sensitivity, negotiation and conflict management skills were at a premium. In some cases schools have to take a firm stand against aspects of local mores and expectations, for example in relation to discrimination, racism and unacceptable attitudes to women and children. This is sensitive territory not only for senior leaders but also for all staff who have to balance respect for religious and cultural practices against issues of children's and human rights.

8. Ensuring sustainability of commitment, finance and resourcing

Sustaining schools and planning for succession has become a high priority issue in the last decade. This stems from three key research findings. First, that few schools are able to maintain an upward trajectory of improvement over time (Gray 2005). Second, that schools are often destabilised by the departure of a headteacher or other key members of staff (Hargreaves & Fink 2006). Third, that both recruitment and retention of headteachers is a growing issue (MacBeath 2006). These are challenges that confront leadership across all contexts and social groups but loom particularly large in socially challenging circumstances.

Whatever the social context and whatever the nature of the challenges that schools confront, sustaining and enhancing resources for learning demands a high level of imaginative entrepreneurship. While short-term approaches were primarily pragmatic, as, for instance, in maximising the possibilities for examination success through revision courses and Saturday schools, quick wins do garner internal and external support. Medium-term strategies tended to focus on innovative practice within the compass of the classroom and the school. It was often the hidden resources of people that could add social and human capital to the school's endeavours. Successful leaders invested time and energy not only in exploiting mainstream funding but also in exploring internal and local sources of support, for both material and manpower.

With regard to longer-term change the schools in this study were sustained by the clarity of their vision and commitment to the values and goals, realised through practical approaches to innovation. With clear vision and commitment engaging the support of external partners and gaining access to external funding was easier. What distinguished most of the schools was their willingness to build over a long period of time the relationships that could be turned into partnerships. In work with health, social services and local development agencies this required detailed discussions to identify common objectives and targets that legitimated joint programmes and shared resourcing. Work with business partners in many cases had gone beyond a philanthropic relationship, as commercial organisations benefited directly from the skill enhancement of their own staff.

Conclusion

What the schools and clusters in this study show as evidence of an ECM Premium on pupils' learning and therefore on school standards is an association among the following factors:

- systematic pursuit of the ECM agenda, for example, categorising and evaluating curricular and non-curricular activities against the ECM five outcomes
- auditing and revising curricula provision to more closely match the needs of students
- providing learning opportunities out of regular school hours targeted on children and young people whose needs have been identified through systematic data monitoring
- restructuring and re-culturing of the school, through remodelling of leadership teams, and creating new roles and responsibilities for staff to encourage 'doing differently' internally and 'collaborating innovatively'
- employing a range of strategies which help parents support their children's learning and empower parents as effective learners in their own right
- close and sustained collaboration with statutory and voluntary agencies to extend expertise and resources which support children and families

These represent an ambitious and complex mix and are virtually impossible to realise without a quality of leadership that is able to share a vision and sustain moral energy in the long term. While this applies to headteachers, it is clear from these schools that vision, commitment and moral endeavour extend well beyond the head and senior leadership team.

This is effected through 'distributed' leadership which may be interpreted in two ways.

The first is through clearly structured responsibilities, tasks and accountabilities. The second is more fluid, more shared and leaving room for spontaneity and initiative. These two types are, however, more separable in theory than in practice and the ideal approach would appear to be a judicious blend of both.

The schools that featured in this study are in many ways outstanding, selected purposively on the basis of their commendation by Ofsted, their trajectory of improvement in student achievements and their willing commitment to the study. By their own acknowledgement they are still on a journey to a more fully fledged realisation of a vision to make every child matter in the fullest sense of that big idea. They see this as a long-term capacity building exercise but continue to struggle to reconcile this with the short-term demands of competitive targets and the unpredictability of neighbourhoods in which each day brings a new challenge.

While the neighbourhoods in which these schools are situated and the communities they serve are in many ways unique, we believe that the challenges they face and the dilemmas they deal with have much wider application. We also believe that the eight high leverage actions drawn from their experiences have relevance to every school that strives, particularly for children and families in difficulties, to nourish learning in its broadest and most life-enhancing sense.

List of schools

Primary	<p>Seven Mills Primary School, Tower Hamlets</p> <p>Carpenters Primary School, Newham</p>
Secondary	<p>Lister Community School, Newham</p> <p>Homewood School & Sixth Form Centre, Kent</p> <p>Sutton Centre Community College, Nottinghamshire</p>
Clusters	<p>Border Busters Cluster, Birmingham (visits made to)</p> <p>St Thomas Aquinas Catholic School</p> <p>St Brigid's Catholic Primary School</p> <p>Wychall Primary School</p> <p>Bournville Junior School</p> <p>Bournville Infant School</p> <p>The Canterbury Campus, Kent</p> <p>Beauherne Community Primary School</p> <p>The Canterbury High School</p> <p>City View Nursery and Pre School</p>
Special	<p>Yeoman Park School, Nottinghamshire</p>

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